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Leaks seem to worry White House

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Washington (AP)—There are signs that the administration of President Carter, who took office promising to open up government deliberations, is dissatisfied with its ability to stem the unauthorized release of information.

Item: A middle-level administration official tells his secretary not to list calls from news reporters on his official telephone log, hoping to keep his contacts with them private.

Item: Assistants to a senior White House aide, reacting to an embarrassing published account of a memorandum involving their boss, search for the source of the leak.

Item: Since President Carter took office 16 months ago, the Justice Department has conducted at least six investigations to locate secret sources of news stories.

No evidence has surfaced to point to heavy-handed tactics to cut off information, or to a White House "plumbers" operation such as the Nixon administration set up to stop leaks.

But in a city where, in the words of one budget official, "most people operate under the assumption that everything leaks," the Carter administration appears uneasy about that. Further examples:

- Administration officials testified in support of a revision of the criminal statutes that could send a government employee, consultant or contractor to jail for disclosing certain information, even if that person felt officials were covering up waste, inefficiency or corruption.

- Justice Department officials, according to a spokesman, Terrence Adamson, have taken affidavits from their own lawyers to find out how a confidential memorandum about an investigation reached the news media.

- The Army ordered new restrictions to plug leaks of internal studies that could influence policies. Ironically, those restrictions were leaked within a day of their distribution.

Such cases indicate that "the administration has taken a position that they want to stop news leaks," said Jack Landau of

the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

Jody Powell, the White House press secretary and one of the President's closest aides, said Mr. Carter has never expressed to him any particular concern about news leaks.

"There's not any organized effort [at the White House]" to control leaks, he said.